DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 222 SP 036 873

TITLE	Engaging Parents. Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community.
INSTITUTION	RMC Research Corp., Portsmouth, NH.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, DC. Head Start Bureau.
PUB DATE	95
CONTRACT	105-93-1585
NOTE	93p.; For other guides in the series, see SP 036 871-872.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Resources; *Family Involvement; *Family Role; Group Activities; Guides; *Interpersonal Competence; Learning Activities; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Preschool Teachers; *Staff Development; Training Methods; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This training guide is designed to build the capacity of Head Start staff to make the program's renewed vision for parent involvement a reality for every parent and program. The guide contains three modules, each with two activities designed for workshop presentation, followed by two or more coaching activities. Module 1 defines parent involvement and contains activities to promote greater daily interaction between parents and staff. Module 2 focuses on individualizing parent involvement, using activities to promote staff interaction with children and families and a sense of belonging among these individuals. Module 3 presents parent involvement as a shared responsibility, using activities that increase effective listening skills to support parent involvement and to form collaborative staff relationships, and that use consensus building to create common understanding of the program's strengths in parent involvement. Following each set of activities within a module is a section outlining suggested activities designed to provide participants with opportunities to apply the information and skills learned in training situations in their daily lives. The final sections contain activities and sources for supplemental information to assist supervisors in extending learning opportunities. (CK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* . from the original document. *
****

SP

ED 398 222

HEAD START

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

Engaging Parents

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

S1036873

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HEAD START®

Engaging Parents

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

This national training guide was developed by RMC Corporation, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, under contract #105-93-1585 of the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

Photo courtesy of Rosemount Center, Washington, D.C.

Contents

Preface ix

Introduction 1

Overview 1

Purpose/Goals
Audience
Performance Standards
Core Resources

Definition of Icons 5

At a Glance 6

Module 1 7

Defining Parent Involvement 7

Outcomes
Key Concepts
Background Information
Activity 1: What Is Parent Involvement? 8
Activity 2: Understanding the Head Start Vision 10
Activity 3: The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement 12
Activity 4: The Staff-Parent Connection 15
Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 16

Overhead 1: Parent Involvement... 17

Overhead 2: The Head Start Vision... 19

Handout 1: Understanding the Head Start Vision... 21

Handout 2: The Head Start Vision... 27

Handout 3: The Staff-Parent Connection in Head Start 55

Contents

Module 2 59

Individualizing Parent Involvement 59

Outcomes

Key Concepts

Background Information

Activity 1: Why Become Involved? 60

Activity 2: Working Effectively with Parents 62

Activity 3: Analyzing Activities 64

Activity 4: Strengthening Parent Involvement 65

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 67

Overhead 3: A New Community Center... 69

Overhead 4: To Make Parent Involvement... 71

Handout 4: Working Effectively with Parents... 73

Handout 5: The Parents' Point of View... 77

Handout 6: Strengthening Parent Involvement 79

Module 3 89

Sharing Responsibility for Parent Involvement 89

Outcomes

Key Concepts

Background Information

Activity 1: Paired Peers 90

Activity 2: Journal Writing 91

Activity 3: Working Together 93

Activity 4: Shadowing 95

Activity 5: Peer Exchange 97

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 98

Handout 7: Journal Writing 99

Handout 8: Building a Program Profile 103

Handout 9: Shadowing 109

Handout 10: Peer Exchange 115

Contents

Continuing Professional Development 119

Coursework at Community Education Programs 119
Skill-Building through Other Agency Programs 119
Working Collaboratively with Other Agencies 120
Peer Support Groups 120

Resources 121

Head Start Materials 121
Other Materials and Resources 121
Resource Organizations and Clearinghouses 123

Preface

"Head Start has not only given my child a head start in life, but one for me as well." — *Head Start Parent, Massachusetts*

The concept of "parent involvement" is so ingrained in the operations of Head Start that there is the risk of taking it for granted. Certainly you and your staff members share the belief that parents should be involved in the program that helps their children gain the skills they need to succeed in school. Everyone agrees that the children benefit from such involvement, and that the parents do, too.

Even so, your staff needs to consider, at regular intervals, some key questions. What do you mean by "parent"? What do you mean by "involved"? Whose job is it to involve the parents?

Such questions are especially critical now, with both the structure of the family and the makeup of the U.S. population going through rapid changes.

Today, the person who "parents" a child in Head Start may be a teenager, a single father, a recent immigrant, a grandmother, a foster parent, an aunt or a great-aunt. Fewer parents are at home full-time with their children. More parents are working two or more jobs or are in school or training full-time themselves.

Families today are more mobile, as they search for better employment and housing. Many families served by Head Start have recently emigrated from Southeast Asia, Central America, Eastern Europe and other distant points on the globe. Families within a program may not share a common language and they may represent widely different cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices.

These and many other factors mean that there is no "typical" parent and no one best way to get them involved. Traditional strategies to involve parents in Head Start, such as classroom volunteering or membership on the Policy Council, may not meet the interests, needs or logistical requirements of all parents.

Recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion call for a renewed effort to enhance family services and increase parent involvement. They have called for several action steps including:

- Reviewing and expanding current resources used for family services, parent education and family support;
- Increased efforts to involve parents in all aspects of the Head Start programs; and,
- Encouragement of male involvement in Head Start.

To begin to put these action steps into practice, programs will need to step back and consider not just what they are doing to involve parents but *whether or not the opportunities are meaningful and accessible to the parents currently in Head Start.*

Because of the more complex nature of parenting today, "parent involvement" is too big a task to lay on any one employee. It takes creativity, teamwork and the skills of the entire staff. *Engaging Parents* is a training guide that can help *all* of your staff members identify the range of families they serve, examine how successful your program is at involving all the parent members of those families and create an environment in which each staff member contributes, individually and as a team, to more successful parent involvement.

The use of the word "engage" in the title of this guide is deliberate. It has the same meaning as the word "involve," but it also suggests more. To "engage" means to pledge or to commit oneself. The word "engage" also is used in reference to the gears of a motor coming together to successfully operate. In the same way, staff members need to *make a commitment* and to *come together* to involve all parents meaningfully.

That commitment must begin with the management team. By holding the expectation that everyone has "parent involvement" in his or her job description... by encouraging, recognizing and rewarding collaborative staff efforts for parent involvement... by setting aside the time and resources for staff to reflect on these issues, share ideas and receive training... you are showing that you are committed to meaningful involvement opportunities for all parents.

Engaging Parents is a foundation guide, that is, it lays out a course of training that is appropriate for every staff person, from the members of your management team to the volunteers. Subsequent guides will focus on specific strategies for involving parents. Together these guides can strengthen your program's ability to build on the tradition of parent involvement that has so successfully guided Head Start in the past.

- Use consensus building as a strategy to create a common understanding of their own program's strengths in parent involvement.

Following each set of activities within a module is a section entitled *Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice*. This section outlines several suggestions for activities that are designed to provide participants with opportunities to apply the information and skills learned in training situations in their daily lives. These extended learning activities are equally important to the training exercises, because for skills to take root there must be opportunities for practice and reinforcement over time.

The final sections of the guide, *Continuing Professional Development* and *Resources*, contain suggested activities and sources for supplemental information that can assist supervisors in extending the learning opportunities begun in this guide.

Audience

Engaging Parents is a foundation guide. All staff in Head Start, regardless of their roles or responsibilities, need to understand the information and demonstrate the skills presented in this guide. In particular:

- Managers will find the guide useful in planning and implementing parent involvement programs.
- Staff with the major responsibility for involving parents can use this guide to analyze the effectiveness of current practices.
- Policy council members can use this guide to engage staff and parents in a dialogue to create a profile of the program's parent involvement activities.
- Staff who are discouraged when parents don't come into the center for activities can use this guide to gain a fresh perspective on what involvement means.
- Staff who informally relate to families as they carry out their daily work can discover how each of their interactions with parents contribute to their engagement with the program.

Introduction

Performance Standards

This guide contains material which will help programs meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards requiring them to:

- Provide experiences and activities which support and enhance parents as the principal influence in their children's education and development;
- Assist parents to increase their knowledge and understanding of, as well as their skills and experience in, child growth and development;
- Identify and reinforce experiences which occur in the home and community that parents can utilize as educational activities for their children;
- Provide opportunities for involving parents in health, mental health, dental and nutrition education; and
- Assist parents in understanding and using alternative ways to foster the learning and development of their children.

Core Resource

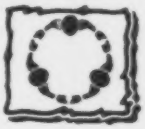
"Head Start Parent Involvement: Vision, Opportunities, Strategies"

Definition of Icons

Coaching

A training strategy that fosters the development of skills through tailored instruction, demonstrations, practice, and feedback. The activities are written for a coach to work closely with one to three participants and can be used in place of a workshop where this is not possible.

Workshops



A facilitated group training strategy that fosters the development of skills through activities which build on learning through group interaction. These activities are written for up to 25 participants working in small or large groups with one or two trainers.

Next Steps:
Ideas to Extend Practice

Activities assigned by the trainer immediately following the completion of the module to help participants review key information, practice skills, and examine their progress toward expected outcomes of the module.

Continuing
Professional Development

Follow-up activities for the program to support continued staff development in the regular use of the skills addressed in a particular training guide. It includes:

(1) Opportunities tailored to the participant to continue building on the skills learned in the training

(2) Ways to identify new skills and knowledge needed to expand and/or complement these skills through opportunities in such areas as in higher education, credentialing, or community educational programs.

Introduction

At a Glance

Modules	*Activity*	*Time*	*Materials*
Module 1: Defining Parent Involvement	Activity 1 - What Is Parent Involvement? (W)	45 - 60 minutes	Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 1
	Activity 2 - Understanding the Head Start Vision (C)	30 - 45 minutes	Handout 1
	Activity 3 - The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement (W)	60 - 75 minutes	Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 2,Handout 2
	Activity 4 - The Staff-Parent Connection (C)	20 - 30 minutes/ interview	Handout 3
Module 2: Individualizing Parent Involvement	Activity 1 - Why Become Involved? (W)	30 - 45 minutes	Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 3
	Activity 2 - Working Effectively with Parents (C)	30 - 45 minutes	Handout 4
	Activity 3 - Analyzing Activities (W)	45 - 60 minutes	Easel, chart paper, markers, Handout 5
	Activity 4 - Strengthening Parent Involvement (C)	60 - 75 minutes	Handout 6
Module 3: Sharing Responsibility for Parent Involvement	Activity 1 - Paired Peers (W)	30 - 45 minutes	Easel, chart paper, pens
	Activity 2 - Reflecting on Parent Involvement through Journal Writing (C)	varies	Handout 7
	Activity 3 -Working Together (W)	60 - 75 minutes	Easel, chart paper, pens, Handout 8
	Activity 4 - Shadowing (C)	varies	Handout 9
	Activity 5 - Peer Exchange (C)	30 - 45 minutes	Handout 10

(W) = Workshop Activity

(C) = Coaching Activity

Defining Parent Involvement

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will:

- Apply a broad definition of parent involvement to their daily interactions with parents
- Define the goals of Head Start's renewed vision for parent involvement and be able to identify current program practices that support those goals

Key Concepts

- The Head Start vision statement reaffirms parent involvement as a cornerstone of the Head Start program and challenges each program to ensure that every parent has an opportunity for a significant experience in Head Start.
- Parent involvement can occur in many ways, at many moments and places and at many levels of intensity.
- Parent involvement is everyone's job.

Background Information

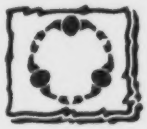
Parent involvement has long been a cornerstone of Head Start. Numerous parents look back at their involvement in Head Start with pride and credit their experiences in the program as a key factor in their own and their children's growth and development.

However, the interests and needs of today's parents and families are changing. Many of the strategies that Head Start programs have used to involve parents, such as volunteering in the classroom or becoming a Policy Council member, reach only a limited number of parents. New strategies are needed to ensure that all Head Start parents have opportunities to become meaningfully involved in their children's education.

To begin the process of creating more comprehensive and systematic parent involvement opportunities, participants will first be asked to create a common definition of "parent involvement." They then will be directed to recognize — and value — the many efforts they already have underway.

Module 1

Activity 1: What Is Parent Involvement?



Purpose: The purpose of this brainstorming activity is to help participants build upon their understanding of the influence parents have on children's growth and development, by reflecting on their own experiences.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 1

Process

Direct participants to reflect for a minute on this question: "What did the caring adults in your childhood — such as your parents, older siblings, close relatives, neighbors or anyone who took an interest in you as a child — do to help you grow and develop?"

Ask each participant to share one of their responses. Have participants contribute in a fast-paced, round-robin fashion until everyone has given at least one response. Do not encourage discussion at this point.

Record all responses on chart paper and post it on the wall. The range of responses may include:

Fed me – took care of basic needs

Provided security

Encouraged me to do well in all areas

Loved me, nurtured me

Set good examples (for example, worked, went to church)

Read to me, modeled reading

Were politically active (for example, voted, worked for legal change)

Taught me how to take care of myself (for example, to cook, to clean)

Volunteered in the community

Promoted education

Put the family first

Disciplined me, taught me manners

Played with me

Were involved at school (for example, parent-teacher conferences, PTA)

Spent time with me

Modeled respect for others and moral values

Provided me with the freedom to learn from mistakes

Helped me with homework

Provided a safe environment

Trainer Preparation Notes:

You will likely have some participants who feel they had little or no support from their families. If so, make the point that children can grow and develop without extensive family involvement. However, in such situations the children must nurture themselves or find nurturing relationships outside the family.

Debriefing

Once everyone has had an opportunity to respond, lead a discussion of the following four key statements (use Overhead 1). Relate each statement to examples from the group's brainstorming. Then ask participants to explore what each statement means, in terms of their own Head Start program. A brief discussion of each statement is included below; use this information as a guide for your discussion.

1. **Parent involvement is often a "family" affair.**
   The person who is most responsible for a child's growth and development may vary. In some families it is one or both of the biological parents, while in others, it maybe a grandparent, aunt or uncle or older sibling. In some cultures and families, many family members are closely involved in a child's growth and development.

   What does this mean for Head Start?
   The term "parent" needs to be broadly defined to include any caregiver who performs parenting duties. Also, the target audience for parent involvement opportunities may vary from family to family.

2. **Parent involvement occurs in a variety of ways.**
   Parent involvement is an ongoing process. Parents teach their children by what they say, what they do, and what they believe. Some involvement is formal and occurs in planned activities or programs such as Head Start. Some involvement is "informal" and occurs in the home. Both are valued types of involvement. How parents choose to become involved may vary from individual to individual.

   What does this mean for Head Start?
   Parents have an impact on their children's growth and development, whether or not they come into the center for program activities. Thus, it is essential that every Head Start program recognizes, values and supports how families choose to be involved.

3. **Parent involvement benefits parents as well as children.**
Parents are people with full lives, part of which involves being a parent. Self development opportunities (such as adult literacy, job training or Policy Council volunteering) are forms of involvement. Interest and participation in self development opportunities will vary from parent to parent. For some parents, meeting their own and their family's basic needs will be the main point of involvement.

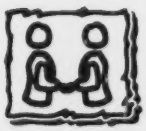
What does this mean for Head Start?
Comprehensive parent involvement programs offer opportunities for parents to grow as parents and as individuals. The ways that parents choose to become involved and the degree of their involvement will vary for each person. There is no one way to involve parents.

4. **Parent involvement is everyone's job.**
Since the form and level of involvement will vary for each parent, programs should provide a wide variety of opportunities for parents and families.

What does this mean for Head Start?
Creating a full-range, flexible parent involvement program is an ongoing challenge. For a program to be successful, parent involvement must be part of every staff person's job. Every contact between staff and parents can communicate and reinforce the value of parent involvement. It is the responsibility of every staff person to reflect on the message they are communicating. It is the responsibility of management to prepare and empower staff as the supporters of parents.

If this workshop will be followed by Activity 3, let participants know that they will further explore what parent involvement means by examining Head Start's renewed vision for parent involvement.

Activity 2: Understanding the Head Start Vision



Purpose: Head Start staff and parents have a wealth of knowledge from their personal lives and day-to-day work with families and each other. In this coaching activity, participants will draw upon their experiences and relate them to the Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement. Participants will use reflection, brainstorming, critical thinking and interviewing skills.

Materials

Handout 1

17

Process

Provide an introduction to this activity by covering the following points:

Parent involvement has long been the cornerstone of Head Start's success. Families speak proudly of their involvement with Head Start and the impact it has had on their lives.

Recently, the Head Start Bureau has put forth a renewed "vision" for parents in the Head Start program. It states that Head Start's vision for parent involvement is "to create and sustain a partnership with all Head Start parents."

According to this vision statement, some of the most important goals for parent involvement in Head Start are to:

- "support parents as primary educators, nurturers and advocates for their children;
- "provide every parent with opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start; and
- "ensure that parents are involved in making policy and program decisions for their Head Start program."

Most parents come to Head Start because they want to do something good for their children. The motivation to improve the lives of their children is a critical strength that can be built upon to provide meaningful experiences for each family.

Explain that this activity will give participants an opportunity to look at what is meant by the terms educator, nurturer, advocate and policy maker, both from a Head Start perspective and their own experiences.

Give the participants Handout 1, *Understanding the Head Start Vision.* This exercise consists of *Exercise A: Caring for Children,* and *Exercise B: Parent Involvement in Practice.*

Instruct participants to complete Exercise A first. Encourage them to spend at least 15 to 20 minutes brainstorming and to try to come up with at least 15 to 20 items for their list. Then have them move to Exercise B, where they will sort the items from their brainstorming list into categories that match concepts included in Head Start's vision statement.

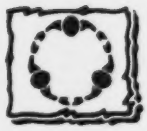
Debriefing

Once participants have completed the activities in Handout 1, ask the following questions:

- What did your parent or family do for you (or, what do caring adults in general do) that stands out as important?
- How has your upbringing influenced your work with Head Start?
- What do you think are the most important ways that parents and other caring adults can be involved with their children?

In closing, emphasize that parent involvement occurs in a variety of ways. It can happen formally and informally – both inside the program and outside the home and community.

Activity 3: The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement



Purpose: Since parent involvement has always been a key to Head Start, most programs already involve parents in many different ways. This activity provides participants with an opportunity to review Head Start's renewed vision for parent involvement and reflect upon and acknowledge what they are already doing.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 2, Handout 2

Process

Introduce the activity by stating that while parent involvement has always been a cornerstone of Head Start, today many programs face new challenges. These challenges may make it difficult to involve parents in meaningful ways. Traditional approaches, such as having parents volunteer in the classroom and serve on Policy Councils, do not reach all parents.

Place Overhead 2 on a projector or write the information on a flip chart. Then read aloud the Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement:

THE HEAD START VISION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

To create and sustain a partnership and collaboration with all Head Start parents, with goals to

- support parents as primary educators, nurturers and advocates for their children;
- provide every parent with opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start; and,
- ensure that parents are involved in making policy and program decisions for the Head Start program.

State that "involvement" means different things to different people and happens in a variety of ways. To meet the challenge set forth by the vision statement, Head Start programs need to examine the opportunities and strategies they are currently using to involve parents. As a first step in this process, it is important to reflect and recognize all that is currently being done to involve parents. Just as Head Start builds on family strengths, it is important to recognize and build on program strengths.

Provide participants with Handout 2, *The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement.*

Note that programs can support the goals of the vision statement by operating under the principles that appear on page 1 of the handout. Then read aloud to the group, or have volunteers read aloud, each bulleted principle.

Explain that the handout is organized into three main sections, which reflect the chronological way in which parents experience Head Start:

- Planning and preparation for entry into Head Start;
- Participation in Head Start; and
- Preparing to transition from Head Start.

Tell participants that in this activity, they will be reflecting on how their program reflects these principles.

Divide participants into four groups and assign each group a number (one, two, three or four). Have them move into their groups. Post chart paper near each group that is titled as follows:

- ***Planning and Preparation for Entry into Head Start:*** *program development and management; recruitment and enrollment; orientation; family goal setting and planning* (Handout 2, pages 3-6).

- ***Participation in Head Start:*** *range of opportunities for participation; parents as educators, caregivers and nurturers of their children* (Handout 2, pages 7-9).

- ***Participation in Head Start:*** *parents' personal development, support for parents as partners in decision making for themselves and their program* (Handout 2, pages 10-12).

- ***Preparing to Transition From Head Start*** (Handout 2, pages 13-14).

Direct participants to read their assigned section of Handout 2. You may want to ask for volunteers to read the section aloud in each small group.

After allowing time for reading, ask each group to reflect on how their program already involves parents in relation to their assigned section of Handout 2. Ask for a volunteer in each group to record responses on the chart paper.

Remind the groups that the point of brainstorming is to generate a lot of ideas quickly, not to get caught up in a lengthy discussion of any one point. Allow 10–15 minutes for brainstorming.

Reconvene the large group. Ask for a volunteer from each group to report on its discussions. Each volunteer should, in turn, present a summary of his or her small group's assigned section of the Vision Statement, as well as its list of ways that their program involves parents.

Debriefing

Ask participants to share one or two key ideas that emerged from this activity. The following questions can guide your discussion:

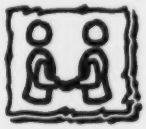
- What did this exercise reveal about what you are already doing to engage parents? Did anything surprise you?

- Has this activity had an effect on how you define parent involvement?

- Did this activity raise any implications for everyday practice?

Close this activity by restating the concept that programs already do much to engage parents. The challenge is to ensure that opportunities are meaningful and reach out to all parents. Note that this challenge will be looked at more closely in Module 2.

Activity 4: The Staff-Parent Connection



Purpose: The experiences of all Head Start staff and parents enrich parent involvement and influence the shape it takes within the program. In this coaching activity, the participants will interview a staff member or experienced parent to help them further understand parent involvement in their program. Participants will use questioning and listening skills.

Materials

Handout 3

Process

Explain that each individual's experience in parent involvement in unique. Staff may have a range of approaches for, and viewpoints on, involving parents. Parents themselves may have other perspectives. This exercise will provide participants with an opportunity to talk with co–workers and parents to gain an in–depth look at how both parties view the partnership they have formed in this program.

Help participants to identify one or more people to interview — staff members and/or parents with experience in Head Start. As participants identify the people they wish to interview, ask them:

- Why do you want to talk to these people in particular?
- What do you hope to learn from these interviews?
- When would be a good time to approach them?

Hand participants Handout 3, *The Staff-Parent Connection in Head Start*. Go over with them the instructions page, which covers:

- Asking to interview
- Starting the interview
- Taking notes
- Summing up what you heard
- Asking for final comments
- Thanking the person
- Taking additional notes as you reflect on the interview

Have participants make copies of the interview sheet for each interview they plan to do. Set up a time to meet again, which gives the participants a "deadline" by which to finish their interviews.

Debriefing

Begin discussion by asking participants to reflect on the interview process. What methods did they use to take notes during the interviews? What was hard or easy about the assignment?

Ask the participants:

- How has each individual's experience influenced his or her work with parent involvement in Head Start?
- How do you compare the perspectives of each person you interviewed?
- What would account for any differences in perspective?
- What is the program doing to engage parents?
- What are the program's strengths in terms of parent involvement?
- What are some changes that people see a need for?

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Supervisors can encourage and support participants as they begin to apply the key ideas from this module to their day-to-day practice. Examples of activities to extend practice include:

Ask participants to speak with several Head Start parents, both male and female, and ask what they think about when they hear the term "parent involvement." Compare these responses to those heard in the workshop. Suggest that participants share their research with others who attended the workshop.

Begin to promote Head Start's renewed vision for parent involvement by getting the "word out" to parents. Make copies of Handout 1 for Policy Council members and, as a group, brainstorm strategies for getting the information in this document out to all parents.

Have participants brainstorm strategies that will both convey to and reinforce with parents the important message that they are involved with their children's growth and development whether or not they come into the center for activities and meetings.

Have participants reflect upon themselves as parents. What areas of involvement are their strengths, what would they like to change? What supports do they need to do that?

Parent involvement:

- Is a family affair
- Occurs in a variety of ways
- Benefits parents as well as children
- Is everyone's job

THE HEAD START VISION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

To create and sustain a partnership and collaboration with all Head Start parents, with goals to

- support parents as primary educators, nurturers and advocates for their children;
- provide every parent with opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start; and
- ensure that parents are involved in making policy and program decisions for their Head Start program.

Handout 1: Understanding the Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement

Exercise A: Caring for Children

Instructions: Reflect for a minute on one of these two questions:

(1) What did the caring adults in your childhood do to help you grow and develop? **or**

(2) What do adults in general who care for children do to help them grow and develop?

List your ideas on the lines provided below. To get you started, here are some answers that Head Start staff have given to these questions:

- Read me family stories
- Listened to me
- Volunteered at my school
- Helped run our local neighborhood center

Reflect on your list. Look at those activities that happen at home and those that happen in the community. Put a check next to those activities that you think are most important, or that stand out for you.

Keep this list at hand and add other ideas as you think of them. In the next part of this activity, you will be asked to refer to this list.

Exercise B: Parent Involvement in Practice

Instructions: From reading "The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement," you know that this vision includes opportunities for parents as **educators**, **nurturers**, **advocates** and **policy makers**. These four terms are described below. Look back at the list you created in Exercise A. Then write each item from your list under the heading where it fits best. Some examples from Exercise A are provided.

1. Parents as Educators

Parents are a child's first teacher. In every part of daily life, parents influence their children's growth and development. In Head Start, parents are partners in their children's education.

- Read me family stories

2. Parents as Nurturers

An important part of parent involvement is providing children with basic needs, such as food and clothing, and with a safe and caring home.

- Listened to me

3. Parents as Advocates

Parents do the most to defend the needs and rights of their children. They play an important role in making sure that needed supports are in place for their children.

- Volunteered at my school

4. Parents as Policy Makers

Parents make important decisions everyday. For example, they decide what type of goals are important for their family. A cornerstone of Head Start is giving parents the right to help make program decisions.

- Helped run our local neighborhood center

When you have completed both exercises, meet with your coach and discuss the following:

1. What did you learn from this exercise about your own understanding of parent involvement?

2. Why do you think Head Start places such a high value on involving parents?

Handout 2: The Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement

THE HEAD START VISION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

To create and sustain a partnership and collaboration with all Head Start parents, with goals to

- support parents as primary educators, nurturers and advocates for their children;
- provide every parent with opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start; and
- ensure that parents are involved in making policy and program decisions for their Head Start program.

Each Head Start program should reflect this vision through efforts to carry out the following principles:

- all aspects of the program support the cultures of the families and the community in which the program operates
- parents have opportunities for participation and shared decision making in every area of the program
- the staff and program meets the expressed interests and needs of each parent, through an ongoing process of personal and family goal setting and partnering of activities to meet these goals
- all aspects of the program respond to and support children with disabilities and their families
- families build the confidence, skill and knowledge they need to access community resources on their own behalf
- family members and male caregivers in their parent involvement activities, especially those involving the development of their children
- parents, staff and Policy Council work together to strengthen their community, to communicate with their communities about the gifts, interests and needs of Head Start families, and to assist in improving existing services or bringing in new services that are needed.

PURPOSE OF THE VISION STATEMENT

Partnership with parents has always been a cornerstone of each Head Start program. The purpose of the Vision Statement is to describe a framework for how Head Start grantees can think about and carry out their parent involvement mission in a quality manner, which meets the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and which reflects the Head Start Parent Involvement Vision Statement.

DESCRIPTION OF THE VISION STATEMENT

It is organized into three main sections, which reflect the chronological way parents experience Head Start.

First, the program must plan and prepare for the entry of families into Head Start, focusing on:

- program development and management;
- recruitment and enrollment of children;
- orientation of parents; and
- beginning the process of goal setting and planning with parents about how to gain the most from their Head Start experience.

Second, parents experience opportunities to participate in all aspects of the program—supporting them:

- in their role as primary educators, caregivers and nurturers of their children;
- in their own personal development; and
- in their responsibility as decision-makers for themselves, their families and their Head Start programs.

Third, parents prepare to transition out of Head Start and move on to the next steps in their lives by:

- trying out and experiencing the opportunities and responsibilities that lie ahead as they continue to support the health and well being of themselves and their children; and
- actually going through the steps of leaving Head Start at the end of their children's enrollment.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION FOR ENTRY INTO HEAD START

Parent partnership and involvement begins with the first contact that a family has with Head Start. Each grantee must develop and manage a program whose policies, staffing and activities reinforce the goals of the vision statement, so that families experience Head Start as a partnership from their first encounter in recruitment and enrollment, through orientation and the beginning process of goal setting.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The Head Start Management Team has the responsibility for developing a successful parent involvement program. The Management Team consists of the Head Start Director, Program Coordinators, the Policy Chairperson, the Grantee Director and the Grantee Board Chairperson. Together, they must ensure that policy and program development reinforces the role and responsibility of each staff person to support parent involvement and enhances the opportunity of each parent to participate fully in the Head Start experience. They must also ensure that all staff have training in the vision for parent involvement and the responsibilities of each staff person to contribute leadership in carrying out that vision.

Sometimes the members of the Management Team work independently of each other. A Head Start director initiates a major activity without consulting with the grantee director or staff. The Policy Council makes important changes in program operation or financing without consulting with the grantee board chairperson. Coordinators get excited about an idea and begin to implement it without working through the director. When this happens, no matter how important or effective the activity or policy, it will probably fail to achieve the desired results, because it does not have the full support of all the Management Team. It may also cause different parts of the organization to mistrust each other, especially if some parents want the activity or policy and others do not. Or it will confuse or conflict with other activities or policies. For all these reasons, it is very important that the Management Team work together to develop an operational style that shares information, carries out joint planning and assessment, values training, and handles conflicts and disagreements without lasting harmful effects.

To plan and prepare for families' entry into Head Start each Management Team must develop strategies which answer the following questions:

> Does our Management Team reinforce the Head Start parent involvement mission through program development and management?
>
> Does our Management Team ensure that each parent has the greatest possible opportunity for involvement in the Head Start program?

RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

The period of recruitment and enrollment is the first exposure most families have to Head Start. It is a critical time to introduce parents to the opportunity to partner with Head Start—to convey how parents and staff work together to achieve the parents' goals for themselves and their children.

Often the recruitment and enrollment steps with families are viewed by Head Start staff as getting the paperwork straight and making sure that parents have the basic information they need to decide about enrollment. For many programs which have waiting lists, recruitment is not viewed as a priority—the children and families are there, waiting to be signed up. These programs may concentrate more on getting the enrollment done and starting the program. For other programs it may be more difficult to recruit children and families and to find the most needy families in the service areas that meet the recruitment priorities established by the Policy Council. For all programs it is very important to have a strong recruitment strategy for children with disabilities.

Whether recruitment is easy or difficult, the real beginning for every parent and child is the very first contact they have with a Head Start staff person, or another parent. Because this encounter is a preview of what they can expect from their experience with Head Start, it is important that this encounter model the important opening messages about Head Start:

> Head Start is interested in you and your child. We value your strengths as well as your needs. We value your culture and language. We have many interesting things to do in Head Start. We welcome you into the Head Start family.

The Head Start program needs to have strategies which answer the following question:

> Does recruitment and enrollment period effectively stimulate parents' interest in the Head Start program for themselves as well as their children?

ORIENTATION

The orientation of families to Head Start is the time when families step into a more detailed awareness of the special opportunities of the Head Start experience. It is a time for welcoming, sharing information and engaging parents in beginning activities while their interest is peaked. Programs need to think very carefully about how orientation is carried out, who participates in and leads it, when it starts, over what period of time it is carried out, and how the partnership message is presented. A positive experience with orientation can set the stage for a successful long term relationship with Head Start.

The Head Start program needs to have strategies for carrying out the orientation which answer the following question:

> Does the process of orientation promote parents' enthusiasm and interest in Head Start and lay the foundation for every parent to have a significant experience while they are in the program?

Family Goal Setting and Planning

The Head Start program needs to get to know each new parent, and each new parent needs to find a way to get started with Head Start. A beginning plan, developed in partnership with the parents, will help the parent get the most out of the experience for him or herself, the family and the Head Start child.

There are some very important features of the process of family goal setting and planning that must be addressed, so the partnership develops successfully:

> The plan is not a one time event, or a form that is filled out during an opening interview or during enrollment. It must result from a process of interactions over a period of time.
>
> The purpose of the plan is to help the parents begin to think: how can we get the most out of Head Start? Since parents will understand this better and better as they participate in Head Start, the plan will change, and probably become more focused as time goes by.
>
> The planning process engages both the mother and the father or supportive person in the life of the family and the child.

The plan needs to start with identifying goals based on strengths and interests, and then assessing needs that will help families reach their goals. It should not just focus on things that are wrong or that the staff wants to "fix".

The plan can be developed in small pieces at a time. It can start with what is most important for the parents at that time, and identify some activities and timetables to carry out those immediate goals. Later other goals and interests can be added when the parents are ready.

Whatever goes into the family's plan, the Head Start program and the parents need to decide how they will partner to carry it out, and how they will get together from time to time to see how things are going.

By the end of the parent's experience with Head Start, the plan should have some closing activities that will help the parent move on. These closing activities should help the parents find other resources to help the family continue to develop its interests and strengths and meet its needs.

The Head Start program needs to develop strategies for family goal setting and planning which answer the following question:

Do we develop and carry out a family goal setting and planning process that will help each parent and Head Start child get the most out of their Head Start experience?

PARTICIPATION IN HEAD START

Head Start programs support each parent on his or her journey through Head Start. In order to provide each parent with opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start, programs should offer many different kinds of experiences that will speak to each of the following variations within their families and communities:

needs	interests
strengths	cultures
personalities	attitudes
schedules	size of families
access to transportation	safety of community
weather	community resources

Some parents will want to be part of sequential, structured events, such as parent education classes and workshops. Others will want to be much more informal and spontaneous in their activities, and will prefer one time events such as socials, crafts, and parent-child activities.

Some parents will want to participate in activities at their Center. Others will only want to do things from their homes.

Some parents will want to make a long term commitment to a responsibility such as serving on the Policy Council or Health Advisory Committee, or volunteering regularly in the classroom. Others will only want to participate occasionally, such as visiting in the classroom once in a while, or occasionally showing up at an activity.

Some parents will best like working on an activity with a team of other parents. Others will prefer to make a contribution or find a way to participate in an activity they can do by themselves.

Some parents will be eager to learn new things, improve themselves, and try out new experiences. Others will be most comfortable participating in the "tried and true", familiar and less stimulating activities.

Some parents will welcome the opportunity to get out into their communities, take on issues, and advocate for parents. Others will feel more comfortable sticking with their Center, their classroom, their children.

Some parents will find it fairly easy to organize their lives so they can find the time and energy to participate in some activities. Others will have so many difficult issues they are trying to deal with, or schedules to juggle, that they cannot extend themselves into the planned array of center-based opportunities. For them, rare and very well-supported instances of participation may be the best possibility.

The Head Start challenge is:

- to provide the opportunities for participation which meet all these variations and which "catch" parents where they interact with all parts of the program,
- to make sure that at least one staff person gets to know each parent, and to help each one figure out what fits best with his or her individual personality, interests and goals, and
- to have strategies which encourage and support each one in trying out different possibilities until the right opportunities "click".

When they are developing and organizing their variety of parent involvement opportunities, Head Start programs should think about each area of the program, and each of the primary parent involvement goals:

- support for parents in their role of primary educator, caregiver and nurturer,
- support for parents in their own personal development, and
- support for parents as decision-makers for themselves, their children and their Head Start program.

Parents as Educators, Caregivers and Nurturers of Their Children

Most parents come to Head Start because they want to do something good for their children. This is a unique characteristic of Head Start that makes it different from most other programs designed to serve low income families. Because parents come voluntarily to the program around the needs of their children, an immediate, positive bond is established. A natural starting point for a relationship is presented. An immediate parent strength is established: "I am interested in my child's development and I think you can help."

Sometimes Head Start staff point out that some parents only see Head Start as a safe and supportive place to "babysit" their children leaving the parents free to pursue other activities. But even for these parents, the relationship with Head Start through the placement of their child in a safe place, is a beginning. It supports parents in feeling they can open up, share their goals and problems, try out solutions.

Head Start programs need to develop opportunities for parents to learn about child development, to try out home-based activities that reflect what is going on with their children's developmental and classroom experiences, to visit or work in the classroom itself in order to understand how young children learn and grow, and to participate in decisions about the classroom curriculum and the education plans of children with disabilities.

"Parents" should include fathers or supportive men in the lives of the children. They must be seen as nurturing partners with the mother, and not only as the person who does work around the Head Start Center. Each program needs to find the mix of opportunities, interests, time schedules and personalities that can support male involvement with the children.

To support parents in their roles as educators, caregivers and nurturers of their young children each Head Start program should develop strategies which answer the following questions:

Do we encourage parents to participate in the child development activities as visitors, volunteers or paid employees?

Do we provide a variety of experiences for parents to work with their children at home in developmentally appropriate, educational activities?

Do we create meaningful, "user friendly" opportunities for parents to become involved in program decisions which help them better understand the needs of their young children, and help them to shape a developmentally appropriate educational program which meets these needs?

Do we support parents in learning about the health and safety needs of their children and their parental opportunities to meet these needs?

Parents' Personal Development

For many parents, Head Start is a journey whose entry point is their interest in finding something helpful for their children, but whose pathway frequently takes them through experiences related to their own personal strengths, interests, needs and hopes. Like parents everywhere, they realize that their own personal growth and development affects the growth and development of their children. Their vision for themselves affects their vision for their children.

For some parents this realization comes quickly, or perhaps they come into the program with a vision for themselves already in place. For them, Head Start may be part of a plan they have already formulated. For others it comes more deliberately, as a result of several opportunities that they enjoy, succeed at, contribute to or learn from. For these parents, life opportunities may not yet have presented a future or a vision of what is possible. Their life experiences may have profoundly discouraged them or distracted or delayed them from thinking about themselves and their futures.

Head Start programs need to develop a wide variety of options for parents to explore their personal development:

- how to master everyday life skills tasks which may still challenge them;
- how to plan for their family life together;
- identify strengths and skills they have that will help them succeed at managing their families or finding jobs;
- work on skills they would like to learn or improve;
- learn how to reduce stress, tackle problems, live a healthy lifestyle;
- create opportunities to socialize with friends and enjoy their families in a safe, healthy environment;
- participate in a community of people who value and celebrate their language and culture;

- work with other parents and staff to address community issues and needs that are important to themselves and their families, or to support important community activities;

- experience relationships with coaches, mentors and teachers who are interested in them and what they want to accomplish; and

- have the opportunity to set some goals for themselves and progress toward achieving them.

As with all efforts to provide opportunities for adult personal development, Head Start programs need to provide these kinds of experiences to appeal to and meet widely differing levels of availability, interest, energy, self awareness and capacity to plan ahead.

To support the personal development of Head Start parents, each Head Start program must develop strategies which answer the following question:

> Does our program have a range of personal development strategies and experiences that will offer a meaningful opportunity for each parent to participate?

Support for Parents as Partners in Decision Making For Themselves and Their Program

Head Start staff and parents frequently refer to themselves as the Head Start family or Head, Start community. They recognize they are in a partnership which shares common concerns and values about the program and the people who participate in it. One of the most important areas of this partnership is that of shared decision making.

Although most Head Start partners think of participation on the Policy Council and Center Committees as the most important area for shared decision making, in fact, this sharing in decisions goes on throughout the whole program. For example, Head Start parents make decisions about:

- the curriculum used in the classroom;

- health services, through participation on the Health Services Advisory Committee;

- parent involvement activities, through planning groups and surveys;
- ways in which the program can respond to and support varying cultures and languages;
- participation in their disabled child's Individual Education Plan;
- participation in family assessment and goal setting activities;
- participation or provision of leadership to community groups and activities;
- choice of activities they would like to work on at home with their children;
- ways to volunteer in the program; and
- serving on special committees or workgroups that are planning and carrying out specific activities or events.

Often we do not think of this wide variety of activities as involving decisions. However, they are all significant opportunities for parents to make choices and decisions that affect their lives, the lives of their children and the Head Start program itself.

To support parents as decision-makers, Head Start programs must develop strategies which answer the following questions:

Does our program expand and highlight the scope and range of opportunities for parents to participate in making decisions about themselves, their families and the program?

Do we reinforce and support the decision making responsibilities of the Policy Council and Parent Center Committees, so that parents truly share in the important responsibility to govern the program?

PREPARING TO TRANSITION FROM HEAD START

Each family needs to feel ready to move on and capable of sustaining the important experiences and opportunities gained from Head Start in their future lives.

Sometimes in Head Start we talk about parents "transitioning out into the community", as if families are not already living in communities when they enter Head Start. What we mean by this statement is "parents moving on to the next stage of their lives in their communities, carrying with them the supports and strengths they have experienced in Head Start." In order to provide this support, Head Start programs need to continually develop and maintain the networks and collaborations within their communities, both formal and informal.

Other times Head Start programs think of transition primarily as an experience for the child, moving from pre-school to kindergarten. They make very specific plans for helping the child with this transition, but spend fewer resources helping the parents themselves make the change.

In order to support the capacity for families, as well as the Head Start child to move on, Head Start needs to think about transition of families in two stages:

preparing for transition by offering the opportunities to try out and experience the things that lie ahead as they continue to support the health and well being of themselves and their children; and

actually going through the steps of leaving Head Start at the end of their children's enrollment.

In stage one, parents have the chance to expand their knowledge about community services and resources, and to explore their strengths, interests and needs in relationship to being an active part of their community. They may learn more about how to access and manage health or social services; link up with community networks in churches, schools or neighborhood groups; serve on community committees or advisory groups or boards; discover community resources they did not know about; plan to continue a service or relationship begun under Head Start; or get a clearer picture about how to relate to their child's new school. These opportunities and activities go on during their whole time in Head Start.

In stage two, they actually prepare for leave-taking. This is a time of reflecting on the experiences they have had in Head Start, making specific plans for what they will do over the summer and fall following the end of the school year, gathering together the records, resources and materials they acquired in Head Start, and making specific plans with their child for enrollment in kindergarten. These are activities that may take place nearer the end of their Head Start experience.

To prepare and support parents and children in their transition from Head Start each program needs to develop strategies which answer the following questions:

> Does our program create parent involvement activities that enhance and strengthen the experiences, capacities and learning which parents will carry into the next stage of their lives?
>
> Does our program help parents who are nearing the completion of their Head Start experience to prepare themselves and their children for leave taking?

Handout 3: The Staff-Parent Connection in Head Start

Instructions: Each individual staff person's experience in parent involvement is unique. Staff may have a range of approaches and viewpoints on involving parents. In this activity, you will use interviewing techniques to examine staff support for parent involvement in your Head Start program.

Approach the person you wish to interview at a convenient time (such as during break or during planning or staff development time). Let the person know that you will be asking only three questions, so the interview should not take more than 15 to 20 minutes.

Begin the interview by stating your goal: to learn more about how parent involvement happens in this program. This way, your co-worker will understand your purpose and can help you keep the conversation focused.

Take brief notes as you interview. When you have finished each question, stop to review your notes or add to them. Say, "These are the main points I heard you say." Then summarize what you heard. This gives the person a chance to correct or add to their response.

After you have covered the four questions, ask the person you are interviewing if he or she would like to add anything more. Then thank them for their time. Let them know what you learned from the interview.

Finally, while the conversation is still fresh in your mind, go through your notes once more. Add any important points you remember.

After you have completed all your interviews, meet with your coach to talk over what you have learned.

An interview sheet is provided. Make copies for each interview you plan to do.

STAFF PARENT INTERVIEW SHEET

Instructions: Begin by stating: "Parent involvement has always been an important part of Head Start's success. I'm trying to learn more about how parent involvement happens in our program. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

1. What do you think are the strengths of our parent involvement program? What do you think parents find most useful?

2. If we wanted to involve *all* parents, what would need to change about the program?

3. Are there things staff needs to do differently to involve *all* parents?

Individualizing Parent Involvement

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will:

- Interact with children and families using practices and behaviors which promote belonging and invite participation
- Practice adapting parent involvement activities to make them more inviting and accessible for individual parents

Key Concepts

- The Head Start vision statement reaffirms parent involvement as a cornerstone of its programs. It challenges each program to ensure that every parent has the opportunity for a significant experience in Head Start — as educator, nurturer, supporter and/or policy maker.
- One strategy to increase the involvement of all parents is for Head Start staff to individualize parent involvement opportunities. This process can begin by analyzing current program practices to determine if they are:

  1. **Inviting**, that is, are current program practices responsive to a variety of parent interests? and

  2. **Accessible**, that is, are current program practices tailored to meet the diverse needs of families?

Background Information

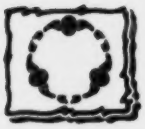
Volunteering in the classroom, attending workshop sessions and serving on the Policy Council are just a few of the traditional opportunities for parent involvement offered by Head Start programs. However, because the interests and needs of Head Start families vary greatly, these activities alone are not enough to involve all parents.

Parents become involved and stay involved for a variety of reasons. What is seen as an inviting and accessible opportunity or activity by one parent may not be so for another. Culture, family traditions, personal beliefs about parenting, the amount of stress facing a family and other demands on parents' time such as work schedules or care of other children, all have an impact on an individual's level of involvement both in the home and in the Head Start center.

Module 2

The challenge is to provide meaningful involvement opportunities for every parent. A first step in beginning to address this challenge, is for programs to analyze their current program practices to determine if they are **inviting** and **accessible**.

Activity 1: Why Become Involved?



Purpose: This brainstorming activity is designed to encourage participants to reflect on *why* individuals become involved and what supports help them stay involved in a program or an activity.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, pens, overhead projector, Overhead 3

Process

Begin by reviewing the key concepts on page 43.

Introduce the purpose of this brainstorming activity and ask participants to reflect for a moment on the following scenario (use Overhead 3):

> *A new community center has just opened in your area and will be offering different types of programs for children and adults. The community center wants to provide family-focused programs. They have asked for volunteers from the community to help them understand what this means for families in this particular community.*

After a moment or two for reflection, ask participants to consider the following questions in light of the scenario:

- What would motivate you to become involved in the center? That is, what would make the community center inviting?
- What could the center do to encourage you to stay involved over time? That is, how can the community center make programs more accessible?

Record participants' responses on a flip chart and post them.

Debriefing

Point out that people become involved and stay involved in a program — whether it is a community center or Head Start program — for a variety of reasons. Some parents become involved because they see benefits for their children. Others become involved because the program meets their own needs as adults. Different parents will choose to become involved in different ways. Often, parents become involved and stay involved because the program meets a variety of their interests and needs. Use examples from the brainstorming to reinforce this point.

Note that the reason why parents become involved, what activities they select to participate in and the intensity of their involvement varies by each individual. Therefore, when tailoring parent involvement opportunities to meet the needs and interests of different parents, the following factors must be considered (use Overhead 4):

Culture. Everyone has a culture. Culture is defined as the knowledge people use to interpret their experiences and to base their interactions with others. Values, priorities and beliefs are rooted in diverse cultures.

- A family's culture and traditions may affect how the parents define involvement, which family member(s) are most actively involved and what types of activities are valued.

- With changing demographics and expansion, more programs are facing the challenge of ensuring that families from all cultures are made to feel part of the Head Start family.

Life Circumstances. Head Start parents face many issues that may affect the degree to which they become involved in the program.

- Mobility, whether it involves migrant families, homeless families or families that move often, requires program staff to modify when and where services are delivered.

- As parents work or attend school, they have less time for volunteering in classrooms or attending meetings at the center. Finding new ways of getting information to parents is a challenge facing many staff members.

- Families experiencing stressful situations such as illness, disability, the birth of a new baby or family disruption may have difficulty seeing what they have in common with other families and be reluctant to join organized activities.

- Parents with younger children or responsibility for elder family members may feel uncomfortable leaving them to participate in Head Start functions.

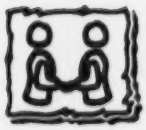
- Parents themselves have different developmental needs based on their own age and life experiences and the number and ages of their children.

- Men, including single fathers, often need special encouragement to participate in programs that focus on their children.

Invite participants for input on what cultural or life circumstance issues are particularly important to address in their community.

Conclude by stating that what seems inviting and accessible for one parent, may not seem so to another. To increase parent involvement may require programs to review not only what opportunities they provide but how inviting and accessible those activities are perceived to be by parents with diverse interests and needs.

Activity 2: Working Effectively with Parents



Purpose: Head Start staff work hard to maintain an environment that promotes meaningful involvement for all parents. This requires that they continually examine their own interpersonal approaches. In this coaching activity, staff will reflect honestly about themselves by completing an inventory of their personal competencies in working effectively with parents. Participants will use writing and critical thinking skills.

Materials

Handout 4

Trainer Preparation Notes:

This activity requires the participants to be honest about themselves. Thus, establishing trust is very important. As coach, ensure participants that their responses in this activity will be respected and kept confidential. If you are successful in building trust, participants will be willing to take personal risks to share about themselves and be open with their ideas. And, you will be modeling the trust relationship that can form between staff and parents.

Process

Distribute Handout 4, *Working Effectively with Parents - Personal Competencies Checklist.* Talk up front about the specific strengths that you have seen in the participants' dealings with parents. Share any ideas from self assessments that you have done in the past and how those assessments were helpful to you.

Make sure the participants understand the ranking task by practicing on sample questions such as, "I can fix cars" or "I can cook many different kinds of delicious meals."

Encourage the participants to think about all of their contacts with parents in the program when responding to each statement.

Direct participants to complete the exercise at a time when they have privacy and can concentrate.

Debriefing

Ask participants for their reactions to having to evaluate themselves. Have them describe the experience — was it difficult? revealing? fun?

Discuss these questions with the participants:

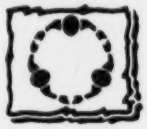
- Why are these competencies important? That is, how do they help staff meet parents' interests and needs?
- What are your strengths?
- Did you identify some places where you need support or more information?

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Ask participants if they would be willing to repeat this exercise at a future date, after they have had a chance to work on specific competencies (for example, in three months). If they are agreeable, mark your calendar. At that future meeting, have participants review the checklist and explain to you what they have done to increase skills in the areas where they had previously given themselves lower marks.

Module 2

Activity 3: Analyzing Activities



Purpose: This activity will provide participants with an opportunity to identify elements that make parent involvement activities inviting and accessible.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, markers, Handout 5

Process

Introduce this activity by drawing from the Background Information for this Module (page 59). Stress that any contacts — whether a brief chat or an activity — that staff members have with parents can make them feel that Head Start is inviting and accessible.

Divide participants into small groups of six to eight. Ask for one person in each group to volunteer to lead the group and record responses. Provide each person with copies of Handout 5, *Looking at Head Start from the Parents' Point of View*.

> Trainer Preparation Notes:
>
> Preview ahead of time the stories in Handout 5. If the characters and situations do not match well with the reality of your program, then create a new set of stories that better reflect your program's context.

Post the following questions on chart paper so they are visible for all groups to see:

- If you were the parent in this story, would you find the opportunity at Head Start inviting? accessible?
- Are there other parents you can think of who would not find this inviting? accessible?
- How might the opportunity be adapted to make it more inviting and accessible to more parents?

Have each group's volunteer select and read aloud one story and then use the questions above to organize a discussion.

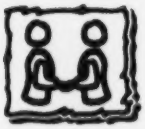
Encourage the small groups to discuss all four stories if time permits. Limit total discussion time to about 20-25 minutes.

Debriefing

Reconvene the large group. Ask each of the small group volunteers to stand and recap one of their story discussions.

After each group has responded, ask the group at large to reflect on the different ideas that came out of the small group discussions and to identify some common principles or strategies that make opportunities inviting and accessible.

Activity 4: Strengthening Parent Involvement



Purpose: As staff work to provide opportunities for all parents, they need to continually examine their contributions to program practices. In this coaching activity, staff will take a realistic look at specific program activities and choose one to analyze for ways to make it more accessible and inviting for parents. Participants will use critical thinking and writing skills.

Materials

Handout 6

Process

Explain that parent involvement in Head Start occurs in many different ways at many different moments. The Head Start Vision Statement can be used as a framework to "take stock" of their program's many different opportunities for parent involvement; analyze these practices; develop ideas to improve them; and share these ideas with other program staff.

Distribute Handout 6, *Parent Involvement Inventory*. Review the factors (below and on the instructions page of the handout) that affect how inviting and accessible the program is for families.

Factors having to do with *Life Circumstances* may include:

- Mobility (such as for migrant or homeless families)
- Work and school schedules
- Illness, disability or other physical factors affecting families
- Family disruption (such as divorce, separation or death)

- Life stages of family members (for example, whether they are teen parents or grandparents)
- Finances

Factors having to do with *Culture* may include:

- Values and belief systems
- Language
- Customs and community expectations
- Family structures and roles
- Practices and preferences

Instruct participants to complete Exercise A, *Parent Involvement Inventory Worksheet*. Participants are to finish the statement with an example of how parent involvement is encouraged in their program. Go over the example with participants, and talk them through possible ways to complete the first several sentences. Suggest that if they are not sure how to complete a statement, they should skip over it and return to it later. Note that there is space at the bottom of the form for listing program strengths that do not seem to "fit" into any one statement.

Direct participants to go to Exercise B, *Building On Our Parent Involvement Strengths*, only after they have completed all of Exercise A. In this exercise, participants take a deeper look at one statement from the inventory to determine the challenges to success in that area and to brainstorm on possible solutions.

Encourage them to think freely and not to worry about how "impossible" their ideas might be. The point here is to practice identifying challenges and seeking solutions. As all staff develop and feel free to use this skill, they can exchange ideas, mull over the options, select the ideas that are worth trying and work, as a group, toward those goals.

As a final step, direct participants to ask for feedback on their ideas from at least two other staff members.

Debriefing

Begin by stating that what seems inviting and accessible for one parent may not seem so to another. To increase parent involvement, the program has to take a look at the opportunities they already provide *and also* think about how inviting and accessible those activities are perceived to be by parents with diverse interests and needs.

Ask participants:

- Is the program providing meaningful ways for participation by *all* family members?
- Did you find the brainstorming a useful technique for identifying challenges to parent involvement, and ways to address those challenges?
- What ideas for strengthening parent involvement did you come up with that you think are workable? How did your colleagues respond to those ideas? What should you do next to pursue these ideas? Who would need to be involved? What resources would you need?
- How could you use the brainstorming skills practiced here for future reflection and planning?

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Supervisors can encourage and support the transfer of ideas in this module from the training situation into practice. Some activities to extend practice are as follows:

Ask participants to become their own researchers. Have participants ask two or three parents what they think make opportunities inviting and accessible in your program (be sure that they ask the opinion both of parents whom they feel are involved as well as those they wish to involve more). What would make the opportunities even more inviting and accessible? Then have participants compare their findings to those of other participants gathering the same information. Are there any trends or issues creating common barriers to participation that should be addressed by staff?

Select one or two parent involvement opportunities that did not reach as many parents as you had hoped (for example, a meeting that took a lot of time and effort to prepare but drew few participants). At a staff meeting, analyze this activity by either applying the common principles that emerged from Activity 3 or asking:

- How many of our parents would find this opportunity inviting? accessible?
- How could we change or adapt it to meet more parents' interests and needs?
- How can we get more information from parents about their interests and needs?

Review the attendance records for your recent activities (for example, over the past three months) and ask:

- Are there some parents we reach repeatedly? Are there some who do not participate?
- Are there some trends we should consider? For example, are most of our opportunities meetings offered at times inconvenient to working parents?

Have all staff complete the personal competencies checklist and use it as a basis for discussion of common staff development needs.

A new community center has just opened in your area and will be offering different types of programs for children and adults. The community center wants to provide family-centered programs. They have asked for volunteers from the community to help them understand what this means for families in this particular community.

To make parent involvement opportunities *inviting* and *accessible*, consider:

- Culture

- Life circumstances

Handout 4: Working Effectively with Parents — Personal Competencies Checklist

Introduction: Encouraging parents to get involved requires you to use many different interpersonal skills. It can be very rewarding when your personal and professional abilities help you to effectively engage a family that had not participated before.

There are several abilities, or **competencies**, that can help you work successfully with people of different cultures, traditions and experiences. These abilities are related to each other but each one is important in its own right. They are listed in the checklist below. By going through this checklist, you can gain a sense of your own strengths and can determine those areas where you see a need for personal and program staff development.

Instructions: Allow yourself time and personal space for honest reflection. You will not have to show your completed form to anyone else.

For each item on the checklist, rate yourself using the following scale:

1 = I need much more training and support in this area

2 = I need a little more training and support in this area

3 = I am good in this area

4 = I am very good in this area

1 2 3 4 1. I am able to understand the thoughts, attitudes and experiences of many different parents.

1 2 3 4 2. I recognize that my point of view may not be shared by parents.

1 2 3 4 3. I reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and stress level in order to stay calm and focused in my work to involve families.

1 2 3 4 4. I treat parents as individuals and recognize that everyone belongs to many groups and no one represents a whole group.

1 2 3 4 5. I am able to stop myself from judging parents negatively.

1 2 3 4 6. I am able to pay close attention to what is being said by parents, both through what they say (verbally) and how they behave (nonverbally).

1 2 3 4 7. I am able to observe parents' behavior and understand the meaning of that behavior (non-verbal messages).

1 2 3 4 8. I am able to see the many different points of view that exist in my work with parents.

1 2 3 4 9. I am able to respond to unpredictable situations without becoming stressed.

1 2 3 4 10. I am able to adapt quickly to changing family situations.

1 2 3 4 11. I am able to stay calm, collected and persistent in trying situations.

1 2 3 4 12. I am able to be resourceful and respond skillfully in my contacts with parents of different cultures.

1 2 3 4 13. I am able to laugh at myself and find humor and irony in life.

1 2 3 4 14. I am able to act in a respectful manner toward parents who are different from me.

Adapted from the Multicultural Training Model by Dr. Mikel Hogan-Garcia, California State University at Fullerton © 1990.

When you have completed the inventory, think about the following:

1. What two or three items are your strengths?

2. Are there competencies on which you would like more training, information or support?

3. How do your strengths and support needs compare with those of other staff in the program?

Finally, meet with your coach to discuss your ideas.

Handout 5: Looking at Head Start from the Parents' Point of View

Story #1 AL'S STORY

I'm a single, working father. I've seen my daughter Rochelle blossom since she started Head Start this year. That makes me feel good about the program. A staff member called me yesterday and asked me to become a Policy Council member. She said it was the best way for parents to become involved. I feel good that she asked me but I'm shy in groups, especially since I'm usually the only man. I'm also worried about the meetings. I hardly have time to spend with Rochelle as it is.

Story #2 JUANITA'S STORY

My name is Juanita. My life seems to get crazier everyday. My teenage daughter is pregnant. I'm behind on my rent and worried about getting evicted. I need to work or go to school because of changes in the welfare system. I'm beginning to be concerned about the number of pills I'm taking to control my back pain.

I'm not new to Head Start. I started in the program when my older daughter was a preschooler but because of the many moves we made that year, I didn't continue. I'd really like my son Ernesto to have the benefits of the program. My neighbor is a teacher's aide and encouraged me to enroll him. Now she wants me to volunteer in the classroom. She says parents need to be involved. She also said that I'd learn a lot about Ernesto by being a volunteer. I want what's best for Ernesto but I'm feeling overwhelmed.

Story #3 YURIKO'S STORY

My name is Yuriko. I'm twenty and have been in a wheelchair for four years now, ever since my Sammi was a toddler. I know it's hard for him to have a mother that's different. Sometimes he takes it out on me. He's gotten better since he's been in Head Start. Having him go the center every day gives us some time apart. Recently, the home visitor has been talking to me about coming into the center for some parent activities. She said she could help me find transportation. I'd like to get out of the house. Not too many of my friends come around anymore. I'm just not sure if the center is where I want to go.

Story #4 PORNTIP'S STORY

I just moved here from Thailand, so I had never even heard of Head Start until my aunt told me about it. It sounded like something I might want for my daughter Malee. I want her to make friends here and to learn English. After my aunt talked to me, I was at the laundromat and saw a poster for the local Head Start program. The poster was really faded, and none of the children looked like my daughter. Even so, I called the number on the poster. The lady who answered the phone wasn't very friendly. I think she couldn't understand my English. Maybe Head Start isn't the right place for my daughter.

Handout 6: Parent Involvement Inventory

Introduction: Several factors affect the ability of parents to become involved.

Factors having to do with *Life Circumstances* may include:

- Mobility (such as for migrant or homeless families)
- Work and school schedules
- Illness, disability or other physical factors affecting families
- Family disruption (such as divorce, separation or death)
- Life stages of family members (for example, whether they are teen parents or grandparents)
- Finances

Factors having to do with *Culture* may include:

- Values and belief systems
- Language
- Customs and community expectations
- Family structures and roles
- Practices and preferences

This two-part exercise will help you think about the different ways that your program implements parent involvement. It will also help you look carefully at one parent involvement activity, to determine what challenges may stand in the way of success, and to come up with some ideas for overcoming those challenges. Please keep the above factors in mind as you do the exercises.

Exercise A: Parent Involvement Inventory Worksheet

Instructions: Exercise A will help you identify your program's strengths in terms of parent involvement. Each statement represents an idea contained in the Head Start Vision for Parent Involvement. Complete each statement, as shown in the example at the top of the page. There is space at the end of the exercise to list program strengths that don't neatly fit in with one of the statements. Fill in all of the blank lines before moving to Exercise B.

Example:

We support families facing challenges by holding orientations at convenient locations such as clinics and community centers.

Vision

1. We support families facing challenges by _____

_____

2. We build on each parent's strengths and interests by _____

_____

3. We involve all staff in parent involvement by _____

_____

4. We identify barriers to parent involvement by _____

_____

Opportunities

5. We support parents as primary educators by _____

_____

6. We support parents as nurturers by _____

_____

8. We involve parents as advocates by _____

_____

Strategies

9. During recruitment we show families what is unique in Head Start by _____

_____

10. In orientation we build on parents' interests by _____

_____

11. We use screening and assessment to support parents by _____

_____

12. We involve parents in program decision making by _____

_____

13. We support families in transition by _____

_____

Other Ways We Support Parents

By _____

_____

By _____

_____

By _____

_____

Exercise B: Building On Our Parent Involvement Strengths

Instructions: Look over Exercise A and pick one of your program's strengths to look at in greater depth. Write that statement in the box at the top of the worksheet. Then, in the boxes below, list some of the possible challenges to success in that area. In the next set of boxes, put down your ideas for overcoming each challenge. In the "?" sections of the worksheet, put down any questions that would need to be answered before the program could carry out your ideas.

Part of a sample worksheet has been filled out for you. Use this as a guide only. The point here is to brainstorm, to think freely. That way you can come up with a whole list of possible action plans. When you have finished the worksheet, ask one or two co-workers for their feedback. Record their comments under "Feedback."

Finally, meet with your coach to talk over what you have learned.

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Parent Involvement Activity: We support families facing challenges by holding orientations at convenient locations such as clinics and community centers.

CHALLENGES	IDEAS
1. Some parents are working or too busy to come.	Videotape orientation so parents can watch it on their own time. Hold orientations in the evening or on weekends.
2. Some parents don't speak English.	Find translators (clinic staff, H.S. program staff, parents?) Encourage parents to bring family members who can translate for them. Make videotapes of orientation in different languages.

WORKSHEET

Parent Involvement Strength: _____

CHALLENGES	IDEAS	?	FEEDBACK

Sharing Responsibility for Parent Involvement

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will:

- Use effective listening skills to identify how other staff members contribute to and support parent involvement for the purpose of forming collaborative staff relationships
- Use consensus building as a strategy to create a common understanding of a program's strengths in parent involvement

Key Concepts

- "Parent involvement" means providing parents and families with a range of opportunities over time.
- Head Start's renewed vision for parent involvement is that every parent will have opportunities for a significant experience in Head Start.
- What makes an experience in Head Start significant and meaningful will vary for each parent and family.
- Program practices and strategies may need to be modified to ensure that every parent feels included in Head Start.
- Creating a full-range, flexible parent involvement program is an ongoing challenge.
- To meet this challenge, parent involvement must be part of every staff person's job.

Background Information

Parents most often become involved in Head Start because of their children. However, they stay involved for more complex reasons, such as for peer support or because of the opportunities for personal development. Sometimes the most important reason parents stay involved is the relationships that develop between themselves and staff persons. The close relationships may be with a teacher, family worker, home visitor, bus driver or cook. Every staff person has the potential for being the key to a parent's successful experience in Head Start.

Module 3

Parent involvement must be part of everyone's job. However, some staff may see their work with parents as central to their job performance, while others may view working with parents as an extra task added to an already full plate. In addition, some staff efforts, such as running workshops, are readily recognized as "parent involvement" activities, while other equally important efforts, such as conversing with parents at the bus stop, are overlooked. No one staff person can — or should — be expected to be the only one "responsible" for parent involvement. The responsibility must be shared. For parent involvement to become a meaningful part of everyone's job, a range of efforts must be recognized and valued by all staff. This begins with acknowledging each person's efforts and continues by creating a common understanding of the effectiveness of program practices.

Activity 1: Paired Peers

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect upon their roles in supporting parent involvement and to actively listen to other participants view their own roles.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, pens

Process

Begin by recapping the key concepts as stated in the introduction to Module 3 (page 89). Stress that many staff already reach out to parents and families in a variety of ways, and this activity will help participants identify and acknowledge each other's unique contribution.

Write the following key questions on a piece of chart paper:

- What do I see as my role in supporting parent involvement?
- What do I do in a typical day to involve families in this Head Start program?
- What would I like to be doing differently to involve families?
- What types of support from other staff would I need to do something different?

Direct the group's attention to the key questions. Ask a volunteer to read through the questions.

Divide the participants into pairs. Partners should have different job responsibilities from one another. Instruct the pairs to discuss each question. Let them know that each person will be reporting back to the group what they heard from their partner, so they need to listen intently. Help participants arrange their chairs so that they are together with their partner. Make sure there is space between pairs so that people can talk without disturbing others.

Allow discussion to last approximately 10-15 minutes. If at the end of that time participants are still discussing the questions, allow them to continue for a few more minutes.

Debriefing

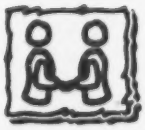
Have each person share with the whole group what they learned from their partner. As they share, write up a list of their findings on chart paper. Keep the chart paper posted for the remaining activities.

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on the information on the chart paper. Ask if there is anything they would like to add. Also ask if there were any findings that surprised them.

Lead the participants' attention to those findings that show (1) how persons in different jobs have similar or different roles in parent involvement and (2) the interdependence of staff in encouraging and supporting parent involvement.

Close by stating that every staff person can promote and support parent involvement in Head Start. The ways in which each staff member supports parent involvement may vary, but everyone's role is important and should be valued.

Activity 2: Reflecting on Parent Involvement through Journal Writing



Purpose: All staff can benefit from a clear sense of their roles in parent involvement and how this role is related to the roles of others. This coaching activity will help individual staff members understand and expand upon their roles in parent involvement. Participants will use reflection, critical thinking and writing skills.

Materials

Handout 7

Process

Explain that the journal writing process of this activity will help participants structure some quiet time for reflection on parent involvement.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

To prepare for this activity, participants must take time to observe themselves and others in their work with parents in the program. Therefore, direct participants to engage in active reflection for a few days before beginning their journal exercise.

Help each participant assess his or her preferred learning style, in order to find a journal-keeping technique that will most inspire their thoughtfulness and creativity:

- For persons who learn best by **seeing or feeling**, suggest that they begin each entry by "drawing" their thoughts.
- For persons who learn best by **speaking and listening**, suggest that they generate ideas for each entry by discussing their thoughts with a sympathetic listener (such as a colleague, family member or friend) or by recording into a tape recorder.
- For persons who learn best by **reading and writing**, suggest that they might want to read some program materials. Or they may want to jot down their thoughts in an informal outline or word map in preparation for writing.

Distribute Handout 7, *Reflecting on Parent Involvement through Journal Writing*. Provide two to three copies of the handout's journal entry page. Explain that this is an opportunity to really think and reflect deeply on their role in parent involvement.

Go over the instructions on Handout 7, helping participants to think through the journaling process they will use.

Direct participants to make the journal part of their job responsibilities for the next two or three weeks (the length of time will depend on the date that you set for the debriefing from this exercise). Ask them to set aside a minimum of 20 minutes of uninterrupted time weekly for this task.

Also inform participants that, at least once during the period that they are keeping the journal, they should pick a concern or question that comes out of their writing to discuss with a co-worker or supervisor. They should then write their thoughts about that discussion in the journal. Note that a space is given on each entry page for them to jot down their ideas for discussion topics, however, they will not have to show their journal to anyone.

Debriefing

Begin discussion by asking participants to reflect on the journal writing process and the method they used to record their thoughts. Move to questions that address what the participants learned about parent involvement as a result of this activity:

- How did journal writing help you reflect on your role in parent involvement?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about your role in relation to other staff?
- What came out of your discussion with a co-worker or supervisor?
- Do you see your role in parent involvement changing in any way? If so, how?

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Many staff may have a difficult time finding quiet space for reflection and getting started with journal writing. To help ensure their success in this activity, ask participants to think about when, where and how they can journal. You may wish to begin by writing journal entries together early in this coaching exercise.

Activity 3: Working Together

Purpose: Providing meaningful involvement opportunities for every Head Start parent and family will take a common vision and the coordinated efforts of all Head Start staff. In this activity, staff will work together to take an inventory of their program's parent involvement efforts. This joint activity will allow staff to share perceptions about their current efforts and to forge an agreement on goals for enhancing those efforts.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, pens, Handout 8

Process

Provide all participants with copies of Handout 7, *Building a Program Profile*. Introduce the handout as an inventory — a list of statements about different aspects of the program as they affect parent involvement. As a group, they will have to decide how well each statement describes their program.

Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to uncover the staff's perceptions about their current parent involvement efforts — that is, to identify what the staff as a whole sees as its program's strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, staff can decide what needs to be done to make the program even better.

Note that this exercise is just a first step in identifying staff perceptions of the program's strengths and areas needing improvement. Stress that this is just a *simulation* exercise. To create a truly accurate profile of a program, the exercise would have to be done jointly with others who have a stake in the program, such as parents and community members.

Divide participants into small work groups of six to eight. Ask for a volunteer from each group. Once participants have moved into their small groups, ask the volunteers to read through each of the statements on the profile, allowing time for participants to rank their program, in terms of each statement, on their own copies of the handout. Instruct participants not to discuss the statements at this point, but rather to score all of the statements independently.

Have the volunteers facilitate discussions comparing each individual's scores for and perceptions of each statement. Direct the volunteers to ensure that their groups talk about and have a shared definition of any open-ended terms (such as "the resources" in statement 2, "available" in statement 4, or "efforts" in statement 8). Remind the groups to expect some differences in perception. Stress that there is no right or wrong answer.

Direct each group to come to a consensus on each of the statements. Have each volunteer record his or her group's consensus scores. Encourage the groups to cover all sections if time permits. Allow 35 to 45 minutes for the discussion.

Debriefing

Reconvene into the large group. Ask the small group volunteers to report on any statements where there was a wide range of different perceptions or where the overall rating was low. Invite comments from other groups on how they rated that statement.

Invite group discussion on the following:

- What are our program's strengths in parent involvement — what are we doing well?
- What would we like to do better?
- What support would staff need to make that happen?

- How could we use this inventory with others from the Head Start community, such as parents and other community members?
- How could we make that happen?

> Trainer Preparation Notes:
>
> If there is interest in repeating the inventory with others from the Head Start community, enlist volunteers for a committee to help organize that activity.

Activity 4: Shadowing

Purpose: It is difficult in the day-to-day rush of program life to stop, take stock and appreciate the role that other staff members play in the lives of children and parents in the program. In this coaching activity, participants will do just that by following and observing staff as they interact with parents. Participants will use observation and writing skills.

Materials

Handout 9

Process

Distribute Handout 9, *Shadowing*, to participants. Explain that this is an opportunity to focus on the ways that different staff members work to involve parents in the program. From this exercise, participants can get a better sense of their own role in the staff team, and they can also discover many ideas and techniques for involving parents that they might want to adopt.

Explain that "shadowing" means they will be a silent partner with a staff member for a brief time: going wherever that person goes, watching what he or she does, observing the results, taking notes and, finally, discussing what they observed with the staff member.

Go over a staff list with the participants. Help them select one or two staff members that they would like to shadow. The shadowing should be of staff members at times and places where they can be observed talking or working with parents.

Direct participants to (1) ask each staff member for permission to shadow for about thirty minutes to an hour; (2) arrange to be absent from their regular work assignment for the time that they are shadowing; and (3) set a time for shadowing when the staff member will be interacting with parents.

Go over the instructions and the example on the *Shadowing* handout, to make sure the participants know how to use the form to keep track of observations.

Instruct participants to take a few minutes right after shadowing to talk about the experience and thank the staff person for providing them with this learning opportunity.

> Trainer Preparation Notes:
>
> Make sure that the people who are chosen to be "shadowed" are open to sharing their expertise. This activity should not be an intrusion but a welcome opportunity to demonstrate parent involvement approaches for a colleague.

Debriefing

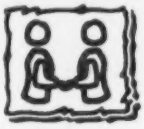
Begin by stating that the ways in which different staff support parent involvement and carry out responsibilities will vary. However, everyone can learn by watching others. They can pick up useful strategies and techniques and apply them in their particular jobs.

Ask participants:

- In what ways did the observed staff members involve parents?
- What did you find most interesting or positive about each staff member's approach with parents?
- Did you get any new ideas or strategies that you would like to adapt and use yourself?
- How can you put that idea or strategy into action in your particular setting?

Assist participants in and making a plan to put the strategy they have selected into practice. Have the participants meet with you again in a week or two to discuss their success with that new approach.

Activity 5: Peer Exchange



Purpose: All staff members in Head Start depend on others to assist them in their work with parents. In this coaching activity, participants will get the opportunity to look at how they support each other to promote parent involvement. Participants will use brainstorming, critical thinking and discussion skills.

Materials

Handout 10

Process

Have the participants select a partner who they feel supports them in their work in parent involvement.

Distribute to each participant a copy of Handout 10, *Peer Exchange*. Explain that this exercise will help them talk about the ways that they depend upon each other in their work to involve parents. This opportunity for discussion can help them build even greater support for each other.

Go through Handout 10's *Peer Exchange Sample Worksheet* to make sure that the participants understand how to use the form to brainstorm on the ways they support each other. Then direct the pair to fill out Handout 10 together. Encourage them to include on their list any ideas they have for new ways the co-worker could support them, and vice versa, in their parent involvement work.

Debriefing

Begin discussion by asking participants to reflect on the peer exchange process. Ask participants:

- What are the similarities in the ways you and your partner support each other? What are the differences?
- Do you support each other in ways that you hadn't realized?
- How can you build upon the ways that you work together, to better involve parents?
- What kinds of resources (staff, materials, etc.) have helped the two of you support each other?
- What additional resources do you need to strengthen the cooperation between you and your co-worker?

Help the pair work out the specifics of how they might work more closely together on parent involvement.

> Trainer Preparation Notes:
>
> Encourage participants to repeat this exercise with another co-worker. As more co-workers participate in the peer exchange process, a web of conscious, deliberate support for parent involvement efforts can be built among staff.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Supervisors can encourage and support the transfer of ideas in this training module into everyday practice. Some activities to accomplish this are as follows:

Have participants analyze their program's job descriptions for responsibilities related to parent involvement. Suggested areas for review:

- How are responsibilities for parent involvement defined for each staff role?
- Do some job descriptions include too few responsibilities in this area? Too many?
- Are the expectations and responsibilities reflective of what actually happens in practice?
- Should some of the descriptions be rewritten to reinforce the message that parent involvement is part of everyone's job?

Identify your own "in-house" experts — staff or parents who have demonstrated the ability to engage and support parents effectively. Provide opportunities for these experts to mentor new staff or staff who have had less experience in working with parents. Mentoring can take the form of a presentation or discussion session or more long-term, ongoing support.

Use Handout 8, *Building a Program Profile*, as a tool for gathering parents' perceptions about your program. Using the results, select a focus area for which the scores were low and/or there was a difference between the perceptions of the staff and parents. Form a committee that is a cross-section of staff, parents and community members whose task it will be to identify ways in which the area can be improved.

Handout 7: Reflecting on Parent Involvement through Journal Writing

Instructions: Keeping a journal about your observations, reflections and ideas on parent involvement can help you in two ways:

1. It can help you think about and learn from your work with parent involvement.
2. It can be a place to develop your ideas on staff roles in parent involvement.

Here are some ideas for getting started. If you learn best by **seeing or feeling**:

- Draw your thoughts first. For example, draw parent involvement as a tree (large branches and smaller branches as offshoots). Then in words, explain your picture. As another example, you may want to draw a chain of overlapping circles. Put a staff member in each circle. Then in words, explain how the people in overlapping circles work together for parent involvement.

- Observe different program staff and activities. Make your observations specific — that is, look for the answer to a specific question such as "what is that staff person doing that makes parents feel welcome?" or "what parents are present or missing from this activity?"

If you learn best by **speaking and listening**:

- Talk over an issue in parent involvement first, with a co-worker, family member or friend. Then use the thoughts from your talk that most interested you as a starting point for your written journal entry.

- Speak into a tape recorder. Again, use the most interesting thought or question that came up in your talk to yourself, to use as a starting point for writing.

If you learn best by **writing and reading**:

- Read a parent newsletter or other parent involvement material from your program.

- Jot down your thoughts in an informal outline or word map in preparation for writing. A "word map" is a way of brainstorming. For example, put "parent involvement" or a key question such as "what is my role in involving parents?" in a circle in the middle of the page. Then down write different ideas outside of the circle. Use these ideas to begin your journal entry.

JOURNAL ENTRY **Date** _____

Here's a topic I need to discuss with _____ **, my co-worker or supervisor:**
name

Handout 8: Building a Program Profile

Instructions: Read the following statements. For each statement select a score from 1 to 4:

1 = Not true of our program
2 = Somewhat true of our program
3 = Mostly true of our program
4 = True of our program

IS OUR PROGRAM FAMILY-CENTERED?

1 2 3 4	1. Parents receive support from the program but are also included as decision makers, policy makers, and program designers.
1 2 3 4	2. Parents choose their own level of involvement and are not judged by staff for their choices.
1 2 3 4	3. Parents are involved from the beginning on all program issues and planning.
1 2 3 4	4. Parents are trained to be effective committee and council members.
1 2 3 4	5. Policies and procedures recognize the value of parents' observations of their own children's development.
1 2 3 4	6. There are social activities for parents and families.
1 2 3 4	7. There are ways for parents to help the Head Start program (for example, fund-raising or doing fix-up work, organizing activities).
1 2 3 4	8. Priorities are based upon what the parents wish to focus their energies on.
1 2 3 4	9. Parents identify what resources and opportunities are acceptable to them from a complete list of what is available.

IS OUR PROGRAM ACCESSIBLE AND INVITING?

1 2 3 4	10. Efforts are made to involve women and men from all racial and national origin groups in parent activities.
1 2 3 4	11. Interpreters from different national origin groups and other types of helpers (such as sign language interpreters or respected community members) are available to help with parent involvement activities if needed.

1 2 3 4 12. Some parent involvement activities take place out in the community.

1 2 3 4 13. Members of the Policy Council are representative of the program population by race, gender and national origin.

1 2 3 4 14. There are equal opportunities for involving working parents.

1 2 3 4 15. There are educational activities and training for parents which helps them work with their own children at home.

1 2 3 4 16. Child care arrangements are made for meetings and other parent activities if needed.

1 2 3 4 17. Parent communications are written clearly and simply (at a 6th to 8th grade level), using language the family can understand.

1 2 3 4 18. Opportunities and procedures are clearly communicated to parents at the beginning of each year or when children are enrolled.

IS PARENT INVOLVEMENT SUPPORTED IN OUR PROGRAM?

1 2 3 4 19. There is a shared vision of parent involvement, written up as a directive, policy or guideline.

1 2 3 4 20. The program has the resources (for example, funding and staff) to give strong support to parent involvement activities.

1 2 3 4 21. Parent involvement is part of every staff person's responsibilities.

1 2 3 4 22. The parent involvement component plan is available for staff and parents to read.

1 2 3 4 23. The plan provides for staff training in parent involvement *and* parent training to help them be more effectively involved.

1 2 3 4 24. The plan calls for an ongoing review of parent involvement activities.

1 2 3 4 25. Parents have been involved in the plan's development.

1 2 3 4 26. The program has made connections with community organizations, service groups and religious groups that serve families in the program.

1 2 3 4 27. All staff make an effort to communicate regularly and positively with parents.

Scoring for the Program Profile: Score your program's efforts in parent involvement on the three separate scales below.

IS OUR PROGRAM FAMILY CENTERED?
28-36 points: Congratulations! You have a family-centered program in place.

18-27 points: You have the elements of a good parent involvement program, on which you can build a family-centered program.

9-17 points: You are missing the elements needed for an effective family-centered parent involvement program. You may want to explore further staff development on creating programs that are family-centered.

IS OUR PROGRAM ACCESSIBLE AND INVITING?
28-36 points: Bravo! Your program is accessible and inviting to a range of Head Start parents.

18-27 points: You have a range of parent involvement activities. Consider how you could expand on these activities to make them more accessible and inviting to all parents.

9-17 points: You need to rethink your parent involvement opportunities to attract diverse parents to activities. Ask parents for their ideas.

IS PARENT INVOLVEMENT SUPPORTED IN OUR PROGRAM?
28-36 points: ¡Felicidades! Your program has broad-based support for parent involvement.

18-27 points: You have some supports in place upon which to build more.

9-17 points: You need to increase your support for parent involvement. Consider identifying a team of staff and parents to assess current levels of support and identify areas for improvement.

Handout 9: Shadowing

Instructions: In this activity, you will follow and observe another staff member. By "shadowing" co-workers, you can learn a great deal about the different ways they contribute to parent involvement. This experience can help you think about and improve upon your own role.

Start by making a list of all staff by job title who work directly at your program site (for example: bus driver; nutritionist; teacher; home visitor):

Select one or two that you would like to "shadow" so you can learn more about how they interact with parents. Plan to follow each one for 30 minutes to an hour.

Talk with your supervisor to arrange for times when you can be excused from your regular duties to do the shadowing exercise. Then one by one, talk to the selected staff members to explain the exercise, ask for their cooperation and arrange a time when you can observe them in action with parents.

Before shadowing, review the Sample Observation Sheet. It shows you how to use the form to take notes.

Make enough copies of the Observation Sheet for each time that you will shadow. Attach those copies to a clipboard to make it easier for you to take notes as you shadow.

During the shadowing, use your Observation Sheet to record:

- Specific staff actions and statements that the staff member makes to involve parents
- Your observations of what happened as a result of those actions and statements.

Shadow the staff member for a half hour to an hour, until you have been able to make several observations of their interactions withparents. When there is a good breaking point and that person can spend a few minutes with you talk about what you observed. Ask the staff member, any questions that you have and thank them for their time. Finally, make a note of any strategies that you saw that staff member use that you would like to try.

Optional approach: Pair up with another staff member and do the observations as a team. Each of you should fill out an Observation Sheet while shadowing, then compare your observations afterward.

SAMPLE SHADOWING OBSERVATION SHEET

Staff Member Observed Blair Thomas **Title** disabilities coordinator

Location entry area **Time of Observation** 7:45am **to** 8:30am

Activity morning drop-off of children

1. Staff Action

Mr. Thomas stopped organizing materials to walk over and greet parent volunteer when she arrived.

Observation

Parent smiled a little when Mr. Thomas walked over to her. Mr. Thomas and child warmly exchanged greetings.

2. Staff Action

Mr. Thomas led parent to shelf and gave information on community resources. Also gave parent some at-home activities to do with the child.

Observation

Parent asked Mr. Thomas a few questions. Seemed very willing to try out the activity.

3. Staff Action

Mr. Thomas pulled up chair and sat down to talk with parent in motorized wheelchair who came in to drop off her child.

Observation

Parent and Mr. Thomas conversed at eye level with each other.

Wrap-Up Questions and Comments

Mr. Thomas said that it took a few months to adapt to a variety of interactions with parents. Now he thinks "How would I want to be related to if I were this parent entering the center?"

SHADOWING OBSERVATION SHEET

Staff Member Observed _____ **Title** _____

Location _____ **Time of Observation** _____ **to** _____

Activity _____

1. Staff Action

Observation

2. Staff Action

Observation

3. Staff Action

Observation

Wrap-Up Questions and Comments

Handout 10: Peer Exchange

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

My Role: home visitor **My Co-Worker's Role:** nutritionist

Activities I do to support parent involvement	How my co-worker helps me
I bring families healthy meal plans that use foods from their cultural traditions	She gave me the idea and the information on food traditions.
I locate community information parents ask for (for example, booklets on educational disabilities or family planning)	She holds workshops in community settings and helps make information relevant for Head Start families.
I work with parents to help their children develop good dental habits	She arranged for a dentist office to contribute free toothbrush packets

Activities my co-worker does to support parent involvement	How I help my co-worker do them
She helps develop nutrition-oriented curriculum for home-based programs.	I found a parent volunteer to help translate the nutrition information into Spanish.
She holds monthly fatner/child dinners at the center	I talk it up, remind families close to the date and help them arrange transportation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PEER EXCHANGE WORKSHEET

My Role: _____ **My Co-Worker's Role:** _____

Activities I do to support parent involvement	How my co-worker helps me

Activities my co-worker does to support parent involvement	How I help my co-worker

Continuing Professional Development

The information and activities presented in this guide are just the first steps in building the capacity of all Head Start staff to strengthen parent participation by making opportunities for involvement more accessible and inviting. To support staff in transferring training into practice, here are some suggested next steps you may wish to consider:

Coursework at Community Education Programs

You can encourage staff members to add to their skills and knowledge base with formal learning that takes place outside the Head Start program. While few institutions of higher education offer courses specifically on "parent involvement," there are related areas of study that staff might find helpful, including:

- Child and family development
- Working with family systems
- Strategies for working with adult learners
- Stress in family systems
- Basic level counseling courses

You can encourage this kind of continuing education by keeping a collection of current course catalogs from local community education programs, community colleges, colleges and universities and other centers of learning. That collection would also need to contain information on financial aid, scholarships and other sources of tuition support.

As you look to advise staff, you will find a natural link between the skills emphasized in many of the coaching activities (i.e., writing, interviewing, critical thinking) and the skills that are developed through Adult Basic Education, GED or entry level college course work. Collaborate with the adult and continuing education providers in your community to integrate Head Start training activities into their curriculum. The result will be a focused and applied training that enables staff to acquire credentials while building their capabilities at work. This will also give outside educational institutions a chance to benefit from Head Start training.

Skill-Building through Other Agency Programs

Seminars and conferences sponsored by agencies outside of Head Start — such as agencies involved in family preservation, welfare, business or mental health — also provide opportunities for staff to continue training in areas related to parent involvement. Such groups may provide training in such areas as:

- Basic communication skills, especially interviewing and listening techniques
- Conflict resolution
- Managing stress to avoid burnout

As with the suggestion above, leadership would need to be provided in terms of promoting the availability of such programs and helping staff as needed to apply and to finance their attendence.

Working Collaboratively With Other Agencies

Since parent involvement has always been a cornerstone of Head Start, staff and parents have a lot of expertise to offer other programs. In turn, other programs and agencies working with families (often the same families) have their own expertise to offer Head Start. Encourage staff to forge connections with other community agencies, and help them to search out and discover such opportunities. Provide staff time to sit on other agency boards, make presentations to their staff or offer to participate on joint planning committees.

In addition, invite key personnel from outside agencies and community leaders to participate in Head Start functions or to provide staff training. By building cooperative and collaborative relationships between your staff and other leaders in the community, you will be providing natural "cross-training" opportunities that can only increase the wealth of knowledge and expertise within your organization.

Peer Support Groups

Once staff members have had their interest and energy ignited by the exercises in this training guide, they may welcome the idea of forming a group that meets informally, on a regular basis, to talk over key issues in parent involvement. In particular, staff working directly — and intensely — with families may need this kind of ongoing support to prevent burnout.

Establish peer support groups with an experienced supervisor or facilitator so staff have an opportunity to continue gaining other perspectives as they adapt and modify their efforts to engage parents. The members of the support group should be the ones to decide, as a group, their rules of operation, agenda, schedule of meetings and level of formality. (In fact, these particulars may evolve over time rather than be "decided.") Groups can use their time together to discuss general parent involvement issues or to deal with the immediate concerns and issues facing members.

Resources

Training and information needs are often varied. The following is a suggested list of resources and materials that provide additional information about engaging parents. It's important to note that these are just some of the many materials and resources available and not a comprehensive list. The materials and resources listed were selected on the basis of relevance, readability, availability and cost. The Head Start Bureau, Regional Offices, Training and Technical Assistance network and fellow grantees are also a source of information and strategies in your efforts to engage all families.

Head Start Materials

Please refer to your catalog for ordering information.

Head Start Parent Involvement: Vision, Opportunities and Strategies.

A Head Start Handbook of Parent Involvement Strategies.

Head Start Multicultural Principles.

Head Start Bulletin, No. 47. September/October, 1993.

Children Today magazine. Vol. 22, No. 3, 1993. Published by the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. See articles, "Serving Homeless Children" and "Interviews with Head Start Parents."

Engaging Every Head Start Parent in Meaningful Program Experiences (video). Parent Involvement Institute, Douglas R. Powell, speaker.

Partnership With Parents (video and user's guide).

Other Materials and Resources

Ash, Carolyn (1994). *Working with African American Families: A Guide to Resources.* Family Resource Coalition, 200 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, IL 60604. 100 pages, $25 members, $35 non-members. This expandable loose-leaf guide offers a one-stop resource that includes annotated references, highlights useful books, articles, curricula and national and local organizations and contains a comprehensive appendices. The special FRC Report, "It Takes A Whole Village to Raise A Child," is included. A wealth of information included in one place.

Resources

Powell, Douglas R. (July 1991). *Strengthening Parental Contributions to School Readiness and Early School Learning.* Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. (ED 340467), 75 pages. This paper provides a review and synthesis of research pertaining to implementation of the National Goal for Education calling for parents to prepare their children for school success. It examines research regarding the following major questions:

- To what extent do parent practices and beliefs in the early years contribute to children's success in school?
- To what extent are desired parent practices carried out by parents?
- How do parents view the task of preparing their child for school?

Levine, James A., Dennis T. Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson (1993). *Getting Men Involved - Strategies for Early Childhood Programs.* Scholastic Inc., Early Childhood Division, 730 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003. 96 pages, $12.95. Telephone 1-800-SCHOLASTIC. Based on the work and research of The Fatherhood Project of the Families and Work Institute of New York, this how-to guidebook provides a concrete understanding of thinking about the development of male involvement initiatives in early childhood programs. Strategies are provided that were found to be successful in other programs across the country, some of which can be implemented quickly. One of the most valuable aspects of the guide are the descriptions of fourteen exemplary model programs. These programs represent a wide cultural diversity and offer suggestions that are real and concrete. The guidebook ends with a comprehensive set of resources that includes books for different ethnic groups and materials for professionals, organizations and programs involving fathers and other men for information, support and networking.

Nickel, Phyllis Smith and Holly Delany. *Working with Teen Parents - A Survey of Promising Approaches* (1985). Family Resource Coalition, 200 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, IL 60604. 139 pages, $12. Telephone (312) 341-0900. This volume walks the reader through solutions which programs have found effective in working with teen parents. Highlights include ideas for ensuring teen participation, selecting and training volunteers, building community capacity for teen services and pregnancy prevention efforts. A directory of programs is provided.

Resource Organizations and Clearinghouses

ASPIRA Association, Inc. A national Hispanic education leadership development organization, ASPIRA administers national parent involvement demonstration projects in Hispanic communities. Publications and brochures for parents are also published in Spanish and English. 1112 16th Street, N.W., Suite 340, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 835-3600.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ERIC- EECE is a decentralized nationwide information system. It is the largest education-related database in the world. The Elementary and Early Childhood Center collects and disseminates information on parenting, child development and child care. ERIC/EECE has a variety of special projects, including Parents Ask ERIC. A free biannual newsletter is available. ERIC/EECE, University of Illinois, 805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801-4897. 1-800-583-4135.

Family Resource Coalition (FRC). FRC is a national membership organization dedicated to communicating the premise, promise and practice of family support. FRC maintains an extensive publications catalog and the largest database on family support programs. The Coalition also operates the National Resource Center for Family Support Programs. 200 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, IL 60604. (312) 341-0900.

Grandparent Information Center. Operated by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Center provides information about programs, support groups, service interventions, research activities and resources available across the country to help grandparents cope with their surrogate parent roles. 601 E. St., N.W., Washington, DC 20049. (202) 434-2277.

Hispanic Policy Development Project (HPDP). HPDP is a nonprofit organization that encourages the analysis of public and private policies and policy proposals affecting U.S. Hispanics. HPDP publishes a series of publications in English and Spanish especially for parents. 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 538, Washington, D.C. 20036. (202) 822- 8414.

Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC publishes materials on all aspects of child development and early childhood education, including parent involvement. 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1426. (202) 232-8777 or 1-800-424-2460.

National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI). NBCDI is a national organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for African American children and youth. The organization offers programs, workshops, publications and communication services. 1023 15th Street, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005. (202) 387-1281.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCASE). NCASE is a foundation-funded network of experienced child advocacy organizations that work to improve access to quality education for all students, particularly those who are poor, members of racial/linguistic minorities, recently immigrated, and/or physically challenged. They have published *New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools* (1988) and *The Good Common School: Making the Vision Work for All Children* (1991). 100 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116. (617) 8507.

National Council of La Raza (NCLR). This research and advocacy organization works on behalf of the Latino population. NCLR's Project EXCEL is a national education demonstration project which includes tutoring services and parental education. 810 First Street, N.E., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 289-1380.

National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). This organization advocates for the needs of Indian children and Indian child welfare programs across the country. It publishes curriculums, training manuals and parenting aids, maintains a database of tribes and ICW programs and houses a comprehensive library of Indian child welfare materials. Among its publications are *Cross-Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare*, a guide for the Non-Indian providing background information about Indian culture and describing culturally appropriate helping approaches ($12.50), and *Positive Indian Parenting: Honoring our Children by Honoring our Traditions, A Model Indian Parent Training Manual* ($40). 3611 S.W. Hood St., #201, Portland, OR 97201. (503) 222-4044.

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 1995 – 615 - 032 / 25024